

CAMBRIDGE, MD.
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Zippered Mail?

Testimony given last week before a House Government Operations subcommittee confirms reports that illegal opening of U.S. mail continues to be condoned and abetted by the U.S. Postal Service, long after the CIA scandals supposedly forced a halt to this obnoxious practice.

Asked by an incredulous congressman how such action is justified in the face of specific federal statutes prohibiting it, a Postal Service official replied that he did not interpret the law "literally."

"How do you interpret it?" the congressman asked.

"Reasonably," was the reply.

The mail openings under discussion are those performed by the U.S. Customs Service in cases where letters

are suspected of containing drugs or other contraband. Evidence was presented to show that customs agents and others had gone far beyond the bounds of "reasonableness" in performing their inspections.

Rep. Leo J. Ryan, D-Calif., was outraged. "One of the last areas of privacy a citizen has is the privacy of his mail. To open someone's mail is the same thing as burglary," he said. "I am incensed by the whole policy and the way it is carried out by the Postal Service."

Television's David Brinkley made the wry comment that if government is going to continue opening the mail, it should provide us with "envelopes with zippers on them."

That's not a bad idea.